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TNC and Partners Protect 17,088 Acres of Florida Nature

Landmark conservation deal ensures climate resilience and water quality in Florida's Big Bend

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The Florida Cabinet, under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, today approved the acquisition of 17,088 acres of pristine Florida lands that lie within an over one-million-acre interconnected and protected landscape. TNC, in partnership with the [Florida Department of Environmental Protection](#) (FDEP), has been working to preserve this property for over a decade.

The Dickerson Bay property (also known as Bluffs of St. Teresa) boasts close to 17 miles of water frontage along the Ochlockonee River and Apalachee Bay, six miles on Ochlockonee Bay, two miles along **Alligator Harbor Aquatic Preserve** on the Gulf of Mexico, and has been long coveted by conservationists.

The State of Florida identified the property as a high-priority conservation project, adding it to the **Florida Forever** list in 1996, and after 24 years, it is now on its way to being protected in perpetuity as a direct result of the concerted efforts of TNC and FDEP. Once the acquisition is complete, the entirety of the 17,088 acres will be state-owned and managed by FDEP and **Florida Forest Service**.

Due to its immense conservation and resilience value for the state, TNC negotiated, entered into the purchase agreement, and has pledged over \$2 million to the protection of the Bluffs of St. Teresa. The land is currently owned by Ochlockonee Timberlands, LLC, a subsidiary of AgReserves, Inc., represented by Dean Saunders of SVN Saunders Ralston Dantlzer. Today's decision by the Florida Cabinet was to accept assignment of the agreement from TNC and proceed to closing.

Situated in Franklin and Wakulla Counties in Florida's Big Bend, the tract of land is essential to the improvement and preservation of water quality and quantity that will directly benefit Florida's critical aquaculture and oyster industry in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Bluffs connects two critical state properties - **Bald Point State Park** and **Tate's Hell State Forest** – and will increase opportunities for nature-based activities, ecotourism and related economic development.

The property is home to at least one rare plant: Godfrey's blazing star, and one rare mussel: the Sculptured Pigtoe, as well as numerous other species including the **Florida black bear**, Apalachicola alligator, snapping turtle, **gopher tortoise**, pine snake, Suwannee cooter, American alligator, American bald eagle, and osprey.

The Bluffs of St. Teresa is situated in the midst of a large, connected landscape of state parks and public lands. It is comprised of pine-dominated forestland with interspersed shrub bog/baygall communities and numerous embedded lakes and wetlands grading into floodplain swamp, marsh, salt marsh and tidal creeks, offering critical resilience to sea-level rise and climate change.

“The Nature Conservancy in Florida has worked for more than 10 years to protect the 17,000+ acre Dickerson Bay property in Wakulla and Franklin counties and due to its immense conservation value, we have pledged over \$2 million to help secure this win. Today we congratulate Governor DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet for voting to support the acquisition of this precious jewel for the citizens of Florida. Investment of Florida Forever funds in these communities will secure a linchpin for vital habitat in the Big Bend that connects state and federal lands in a ribbon of conservation. It also offers the potential for ecotourism, unprecedented public access to nature-based recreation, and the economic development related to these activities in the region,” said Temperince Morgan, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Florida. “During these challenging times, people are increasingly aware of how vital nature is to our physical, mental and emotional health. It is encouraging that the Governor and Cabinet recognize the importance of conservation to the health of our great state.”

Don Sleight, CEO of AgReserves, Inc. said, “It’s gratifying to know this land will be preserved for generations to come. As farmers and ranchers, we work with natural systems every day, so we look to the long-term in everything we do. We’re pleased to be working with The Nature Conservancy to make this property part of Florida Forever’s enduring stewardship.”

Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein said, “I would like to thank the Governor and Cabinet for their support of this purchase of the Dickerson property and my profound appreciation for the partnership of The Nature Conservancy that has made the unique and critical acquisition possible. This acquisition will provide increased protection of water quality and natural functions of this important land, water and wetland ecosystem in Florida’s Panhandle and further our state’s coastal resiliency efforts along the Gulf of Mexico.”

Governor DeSantis said, “Conserving lands for future generations is vital to our state’s environmental heritage. Conserving large tracts of land like The Bluffs will ensure environmental protection, as well as economic and recreational opportunities for our residents and visitors, now and into the future. I applaud DEP and The Nature Conservancy for their hard work in finalizing this acquisition of more than 17,000 acres that will conserve over two miles of frontage on the Gulf of Mexico, six miles of frontage on Ochlockonee Bay, and eight and a half miles of frontage on the Ochlockonee River.”

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world’s toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 79 countries and territories, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org or follow [@nature_press](https://twitter.com/nature_press) on Twitter.

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